

**REPORT TO THE TWENTY-SECOND LEGISLATURE**

**STATE OF HAWAII**

**2004**

**PURSUANT TO SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NUMBER 12,  
REGARDING REQUESTING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A TASK  
FORCE ON GRADUATED PARENTING**

**PREPARED BY:  
STATE OF HAWAII  
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH  
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## **Introduction**

*“Strengthen the parent, and you strengthen the child.”*

-Fred Rogers

With the passage of Senate Concurrent Resolution 12 during Legislative Session 2003, the State Legislature recognized that parents have a need to understand their children’s stages of development as they progress through the levels of their education; from preschool to elementary school, from elementary to middle school, and again from middle school to high school. The Department of Health (DOH) was asked to convene a task force to develop a plan for a Graduated Parenting Program utilizing the public schools as appropriate and convenient settings to operate such a program. Task Force meetings began in September 2003 facilitated by the staff of the Maternal and Child Health Branch, DOH, and including members representing organizations which were listed in the resolution. (A list of the members of the Graduated Parenting Task Force [“Task Force”] is included in attachment A.)

This report to the Legislature summarizes the work of the Task Force, providing an overview of key recommendations and next steps that will lead to implementation. The Task Force agreed on some specific recommendations, and believes that there is a continuing role for the Task Force to oversee implementation and building of the graduated parenting program. Therefore, it would like to recommend that the Task Force be extended so that progress can be tracked over time.

## **Background**

SCR 12 was strongly supported by the Keiki Caucus. Facilitated by legislators, with input from public and private agencies as well as community groups and individuals, Keiki Caucus’ focus is children’s issues with emphasis on primary prevention. Providing a continuum of parenting education and support to parents as their children mature would serve as a clear preventive strategy towards the end of strengthening families and helping children successfully achieve their critical developmental milestones. How can we assure competent future parents as well as competent parents today? From many discussions, the idea of a “graduated parenting program”

emerged whose goal would be the development of an integrated, flexible statewide system of parenting education in Hawaii.

A “graduated parenting program” is the provision of specific knowledge and child-rearing skills to parents based on the continuum of child development. The premise is that each stage of a child’s development demands new and specific parenting skills and that development continues from birth through adolescence. The Task Force outlined certain implementation strategies and began the work of establishing indicators by which success in attaining the ultimate goal could be measured. This work is on going and would be facilitated by the Coordinator who would be situated in the MCHB.

It is important that the Task Force report and plan to the legislature be realistic and actionable. Finding reasonable solutions that will work to solve the problem of an uncoordinated system of parenting education services is an essential criteria guiding the considerations of the Task Force.

### **Description and Analysis of Problem**

Many parents feel guilty, frustrated, anxious or embarrassed because they are expected to handle parenting skillfully without the proper preparation, knowledge or support. Historically, assistance came from the extended family, informal neighborhood networks and community affiliations (Zepeda & Morales, 2001). With the complex changes in society, parents are on their own, without the benefit of the support that was easily available to parents a generation ago, or for many immigrants, that they left back in their country of origin. All parents, regardless of income level or other challenges, need and want to be prepared for their role as parents (Pew Trusts, 1996).

Along with this, all parents form beliefs about their child that translates into behavior toward that child. Children, whose parents hold accurate conceptions about their children’s abilities, develop best (Miller, 1988). Parents who understand child development are more likely to: 1) have realistic expectations of their child; 2) be better able to anticipate and provide support to the child in the ensuing developmental stage; and 3) be better able to understand and manage their child’s

behavior, including discipline, in appropriate ways. Baranowski, Schilmoeller and Higgins (1990) found this true of adolescent mothers as well. Those with inappropriate expectations scored lower on parenting skills than those with appropriate expectations.

Studies have been conducted to assess parents' knowledge about early childhood development (Zero to Three, 1997; Parks & Smeriglio, 1986; Kliman & Vukelich, 1985; Stevens, 1984) and, specifically to assess teen parents' knowledge about their infant (Freeman & Newland, 2002; Hurlbut & McDonald, 1997, Fulton & Murphy, 1991). However, studies that assess parents' knowledge about middle and adolescent development are absent. It may be possible to deduce that this lack of knowledge of childhood development also includes the older child and adolescents.

Research on parents' knowledge about young children generally shows that parents tend to under-estimate infants' abilities, while they overestimate, sometimes by several years, the abilities of the older children up to age 8 (Miller, 1988). For example, in the "What Grown-Ups Understand about Child Development" national survey (Zero to Three, 1997), when queried: "At what age do you think an infant or young child begins to really take in and react to the world around them?" 61% believe that this does not occur until two months or older. Research shows that infants are reacting to the world even before they are born. This benchmark survey further indicates that subgroups of respondents show significant differences in knowledge: college educated parents know more child development, fathers have greater knowledge gaps, there is a knowledge gap between generations, and those without children show the highest level of misinformation.

Miller's meta-analysis of parental knowledge concludes that "mothers who held accurate conceptions of their child's ability would be more likely to create good, development-enhancing matches than would mothers who either overestimated or underestimated what their child could do." (Miller, 1988). Stevens (1984) further suggests that a systematic educational program would enhance both parents' knowledge and skill.

Although knowledge of development of infants and young children were the focus of the studies mentioned, it is possible to extrapolate the findings to include parents of older children. In fact, it may be assumed that parents of older children are even less likely to have knowledge about the appropriate developmental stages, because when children enter school, parents become less involved and the presumption is that “it’s the teachers job.” Parents only become involved if a problem arises. Freeman and Newland (2002) did examine the family during adolescent transition and found that the way parents communicate emotional responsiveness changes as the child moves developmentally into adolescence. There is less physical affection as with a younger child, and more openness and understanding. However, they do not mention parents’ knowledge of development in their study.

The conclusion drawn from research and collective experience of the Task Force is that **strengthening parental knowledge and skills across the developmental continuum will lead to a better parent-child relationship and positive child and adolescent outcomes.**

### **Resources**

Work towards developing a current resource list for parenting education services across the State was begun by the Task Force. Many family support programs provide parenting education, but these programs have difficulty attracting parents. One provider stated that his program is an 8-week module but parents attend only until their question is answered. Most parents do not complete the program for a variety of reasons which need to be compiled and analyzed.

Community agencies, on the other hand, report that parents feel that there are no services or very few services available that provide parenting education. A definite gap exists in accessing parenting education. Understanding how parent education fits into the broader spectrum of family support services is an important step in planning an integrated system.

While the Task Force acknowledges that all parents would benefit from the graduated parenting system, parents come in “all shapes and sizes” as discussed above. A multi-level, culturally appropriate approach will be needed to assure that all parents are able to obtain the information

in a form that is best suited for them. This may range from public service announcements to formal parenting education classes.

The network for early childhood programs in Hawaii is in the developmental stage. Good Beginnings Alliance (GBA) is the umbrella agency for many early childhood initiatives which determine the building blocks of a comprehensive early childhood system of care. The emphasis is on brain development and assurance that the young child is “healthy, safe and ready to learn.” Enhancing early child development is a key component of the effort. The DOH, GBA, University of Hawaii, other private agencies and advocacy groups are working together in close partnership to articulate all aspects of a coordinated system of care for young children. The graduated parenting program will focus attention on the importance of parenting support in achieving the goal of a healthy and safe child who is ready to succeed in school.

A network to provide a comprehensive and cohesive array of parenting services for the older child is not being planned at this time. However, targeted resources are available through the State and District Family Support/PCNC Teams in the Department of Education. Further, the Board of Education has adopted a Parent Involvement Policy for the public schools that includes “parenting” as one of the components.

Many organizations provide parenting information and education: Parent Line, PARENTS, Inc. Other organizations have parenting embedded as a part of the total program (e.g., Healthy Start, Public Health Nursing, TIFFE). Still others provide these services as part of family support services (e.g., Family Centers). Further analysis is needed to understand the full scope and capacity of the myriad of available services.

### **Recommendations**

Continue the work of the Task Force to develop an integrated system of graduated parenting statewide. The Task Force will need to articulate with greater specificity the four components of the system:

- 1) develop the framework and curricula for the program,

- 2) develop the delivery system
- 3) assure the sustainability of the system
- 4) evaluate the long and short-term outcomes.

The work of the Task Force for the next year may include the following activities:

1. Research, identify and develop parenting training model(s) that focus on child development through the continuum of childhood and adolescence with the input of this advisory Task Force group. The model will need to accommodate child development and parenting within the context of different languages and cultures. To pilot the effectiveness of the system, two communities including schools and community agencies, one urban and one rural, will be approached to participate.
2. Develop a multi-faceted, coordinated delivery system that is culturally sensitive, with the assistance of community, schools and business sectors (refer to Description of delivery system below).
3. Explore innovative funding sources to sustain the program, including grants, private foundations, business partnerships and trust funds.
4. Formulate measures of effectiveness by collecting and reporting aggregate data on outcomes related to families and children. These outcomes will be determined for the different developmental ages and necessary parenting skills by members of this Task Force with input from consumers and interested community members.

**Description of the model:**

Hawaii's diverse culture that includes a "local style" requires a model(s) that tailors child development and parenting messages within the context of language and culture, and is flexible enough to accommodate a multi-level approach. The model will include specific knowledge and child-rearing skills to negotiate the various transition points in the child's life.

Parenting programs are available nationally that address child development along with fundamental parenting skills. For example:

- Indiana's Family and Consumer Sciences Education, "Child Development and Parenting" (suggested for grade 10 and up);

- Oklahoma Department of Vocational and Technical Education, “Parenting and Child Development;”
- Lynn Lott and Jane Nelson, “ Positive Discipline Parenting and Classroom Management Model;”
- Colorado State University, “Enhancing Child Development: The Beginning Years/The Middle Years, Fostering Families” (specifically for foster parents and foster care workers); and
- Division of Adolescent Medicine, Children’s Hospital Medical Center, Cincinnati, Ohio, “Basic Contents in Identifying the Health Needs of Adolescents.”

**Description of delivery system:**

The Task Force will be charged with choosing and adapting a chosen model for system implementation. The Task Force, recognizing the various ways that parents acquire and process knowledge, recommends three venues:

1. School and Community-based programs: Public schools and Parent-Community Networking Centers provide one venue to deliver a graduated parenting system but they are not the only setting. Schools should be an integral part of a larger effort, which includes private/independent schools, preschools, businesses and the community.

It is clear that agencies that are accessible to families (e.g., schools, churches, social service agencies, early education sites, family resource centers) can be the locus of information and support if they are provided with the appropriate resources and materials to conduct graduated parenting activities. Non-traditional settings, especially those that parents frequent, like grocery stores and shopping malls, should be explored as well.

2. A Central resource “hub”: It is recognized that the needs of the various age groups require different parenting skills and resources. A resource hub, including a website, to house current resources and information about coming events, can be a valuable point of contact for parents, health care providers and community agencies.



The purpose of the hub is to keep developmental parenting information centralized, current and accessible to all. The Parent Line provides a similar service to families of young children. The model that the School Readiness Task Force (The Good Beginnings Interdepartmental Council, 2002) advocates, which is a central point of contact that provides resources and technical assistance for families of children from birth to third grade, can be expanded through the child and adolescence age continuum, thereby providing a more seamless system.

3. Multi-media campaign: A comprehensive on-going media campaign; melding child development and parenting programs and multi-media resources offer a perfect means for disseminating information. This campaign can provide messages that are reinforced regularly through various media, including television, radio, a web site, and community outlets, such as newsletters and newspapers.

### **Conclusion**

Thoughtful planning can provide Hawaii's parents with a network of sites and a cadre of information which will address the parenting needs of children at various stages of their growth and development, and provide the skills and knowledge that are needed through the parenting-childhood continuum. A multi-faceted, multi-level, coordinated system that is culturally sensitive with the involvement of parents, the community, schools, and business is a model that will provide increased parenting resources. The continued work of the Task Force will be limited by the volunteer nature of its work and its lack of dedicated resources. Given existing budgetary constraints, it is recommended that the Task Force explore private sector or federal grant options to support its goals and objectives. As these resources become available to support the development of a variety of curricula, sites and information hubs, parents will be better equipped to nurture their children's healthy growth and development and to shepherd them through to successful adulthood.

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